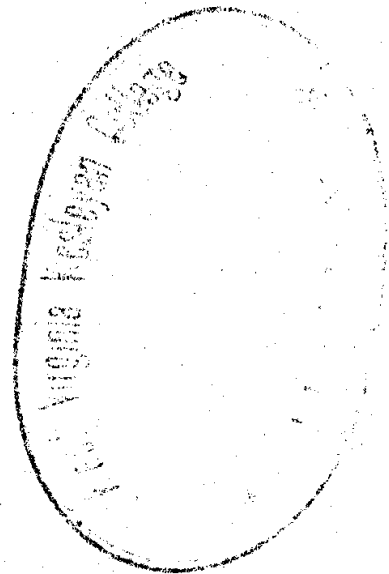
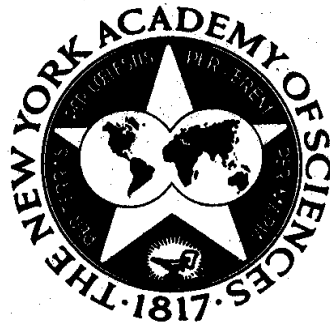


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LIVING, WORKING, AND RELATING TO OTHERS

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PART III. EXTENT AND DISTRIBUTION OF DISEASE

THE APPALACHIAN COAL MINER: HIS WAY OF LIVING, WORKING, AND RELATING TO OTHERS

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Since this paper on the way of life of the coal miner has been placed under "Extent and Distribution of Disease," it seems appropriate to begin with some comments on how differently dust has been viewed by miners and physicians.

THE REALITY OF DUST

The miners' awareness of the hazards of coal dust is evident in their folk ways and union actions. One coal miner song dealt directly with this danger:

I used to be a drill man . . .
'til it got the best of me . . .
It killed two fellow workers
here at old Parlee
And now I've eaten so much dust,
Lord, that it is killing me.¹

In a 1913 poem, melodramatically addressed to "Ye, who sit in luxury's lap, and ye who ride in state," the miner-writer asked, "[D]o you ever think of our gruesome lives or bemoan our children's fate?" He described coal miners with "backs bent low" and "lungs becgogged with dust." * ²

"We all know," wrote a miner's local union in 1936, "that 30 percent of the miners are afflicted with miners' asthma . . . caused by breathing air currents laden with coal dust . . . and climbing these stairways . . . 200 feet in depth [which] is too hard on their pulmonary organs after breathing such atmospheres for 15 to 20 years in coal mines." ³ West Virginia miners sent in a resolution to the 1936 UMW Convention, noting that "[H]undreds of coal miners have contracted a disease known as 'Miner's Asthma,' while in line of regular employment, due to the conditions in which they work; and laws do not allow compensation. . . ." ⁴ In the same year, a Kentucky miner described his life in Dark Hollow in vivid terms:

We are six brothers, all six feet. . . . We mine coal. Miles back into the bowels of the mountain we burrow. . . . Our days are lived in the dark, bent in a strained crouch. . . . Bodies as black as that coal. Lungs the color of mashed poke berries. We breathe black air. We spit black spit.⁵

Perhaps the miner who wrote the song "Sprinkle Coal Dust on My Grave" ^{† 2} to the tune of "Maple on the Hill" was sending as pointedly playful a message to physicians as the hypochondriac who asked that his tombstone

* p. 128.

† p. 65.

read "I told you so." But for many years, little, if any, notice was given to the illnesses of miners, to their dusty work environment, or to the real symptoms they presented. When increasing mine mechanization raised dust levels, physicians repeated then standard statements that coal dust was "among the least harmful dusts." * ⁷ In fact, at one time it was thought that coal dust might prevent tuberculosis in miners.⁹ It is remarkable that so little attention was paid to the occupational factor in view of warnings as early as 1916 that coal mining was directly related to various respiratory diseases from which coal miners suffered in much greater proportion than the general population.† ¹⁰

The reason for the scientific lag is uncertain. Perhaps physicians had failed to heed Osler's advice: "Listen to the patient. He is diagnosing himself," for miners themselves were hardly unaware of shortness of breath, morning cough, black spittle, crushing disability, and early old age, usually called "miners' asthma."

The teen-age tunnel worker with silicosis in the novel, *Hawk's Nest*, is troubled because no one seems to know why the men are dying at Gauley Bridge.

"Maw, I been thinken a lot," he said, "It's funny how all them fellers worken at the tunnel are dyen. . . ."

"I been over and over it in my head, Maw. There must be some reason 'sides the cough. If it was pneumoney, seems like womenfolk would get it, and the little ones. . . ."

"Sitten here, hearken the ambulance ever day," he went on quietly, "I get to thinken. Now I got the trouble and Paw's got it, and Mark, he coughs some too. But you and Viney, you ain't never had it. That's a funny thing, don't you think, Maw?" ¹³

General professional ignorance of the excellent 1943 *History of Miners' Diseases*,⁶ by George Rosen, exemplifies the lack of American medical interest in coal workers' pneumoconiosis. Today's professional attention to the disease, illustrated by this conference, is the "in thing," and it is welcome.

It would be my hope that an honest physician might try to answer the obvious question: why was it that, in the words of Meiklejohn,¹⁴ "after 100

* Longevity and coal mining go together because of "the peculiar properties of a coal mine beneficial" to the miners' lungs.⁸

† For example, coal miner "mortality from nontuberculous respiratory disease is quite excessive, or 40.9 percent at ages 35 to 44; 84.7 percent at ages 45 to 54, and 76.1 percent at ages 55 to 64. Coal dust and other working conditions in our coal mines seem to affect injuriously the air passages and lungs and the general vitality to the extent that coal miners are made more susceptible to such diseases as pneumonia, bronchitis and asthma. . . ." ¹⁰ Another writer stated, "Coal miners are affected by the dust they breathe and owe at least a proportion of their mortality from respiratory diseases to this cause." ¹¹ Hayhurst ⁷ emphasizes "fine dust," saying that "the dust hazard is great;" hand loaders "subjected to air conditions of the distant interior . . . and to immense amounts of dust;" machine men, faced with similar "ventilation hazards" and "most subject of all workers to breathing fine dust (bug dust)." (p. 361) However, a coal company magazine foretold later medical reasoning. It stated that ". . . almost to a man or boy, the miners . . . are more or less addicted to the habit" of cigarette-smoking, "so insidious and deadly in its effect." "[M]uch of the so called Miners Asthma can be laid at the door of Brudder pipe and Miss cigarette. . . ." ¹²

years, the wheel had turned full circle; doctors were back at the beginning, again speculating" about grave medical warnings concerning the danger of black lung and breathlessness first made about Scottish coal miners in the early 19th Century.

LIFE STYLE OF THE MINER

The coal mine work force today consists mostly of older men shaped by the depression, labor struggle, and bitter economic experiences, and of a growing number of young miners about whom we know little and speculate much. One executive said that the average age of his men was 46. But that figure is like the creek that had an average depth of six inches and yet was deep enough to drown a man; it could be quite deceptive. Many in the mines are 50 years and older, and a large and increasing number are 35 and younger. But young or old, the coal miner has been regarded by the American public as a kind of inferior, dirty, ignorant, substandard human. Who else would daily risk his life underground and live in such drab surroundings? When a mine disaster occurs, a coal strike threatens, or union feuding erupts openly, national curiosity about the American coal miner is briefly aroused. Even that is usually directed patronizingly toward "doing something for" the miner or changing his situation or his union. Otherwise, the coal miner maintains his rural existence far from the nation's centers of decision and opinion-making without being noticed or understood by his fellow citizens.

The majority of miners live and work in the heartland of the Appalachian bituminous coal area, stretching from southwestern Pennsylvania to northern Alabama. Here, in hilly to rough terrain, with few large cities and little agriculture, the population is mainly rural, clustered in settlements between hills and along creeks. Far more than his urban blue collar counterpart, the coal miner is limited by his historically isolated life, unaltered by other experiences. Large numbers of miners and their families live in small communities, formerly company towns. For the older miners, local influences are much stronger than the impact of national culture. Kinship ties are powerful, and the husband seems to be in charge, although the wife generally rules the paycheck, home, and children. Aside from the immediate family, however, it is a man's world, and the sexes usually go their separate ways socially.

As a group, miners are proud, generous, disarmingly modest about their courage and ability, hospitable, and courteous. They seem to rely on a keen intuition, a practical sense of reality, and feelings unfettered by intricate codes of etiquette. Living close together and sharing a common background, life experience, income and educational level, daily pleasure, and occupational hazard, neighbors are responsive and helpful; relationships informal; inter-marriage common. Church membership and status are not important. Although row houses have been individualized, they are basically similar, without qualitative differences worth noting. Such housing may cost half that of a city residence, to rent or to buy. Miners tend to buy new cars, color TV, major appliances, and modern furnishings, all of which for many of them make more sense than large home mortgages.

The work in the mines is hard and sometimes cruel. Working conditions appear to make miners cautious and reckless at once, resourceful and independent, quick both to think and to act. They relate to one another in a more

realistic and more supportive fashion than other industrial workers. The "good buddy" style of coal miners can be characterized as open, friendly, helpful but tough; hostile to the company but not lazy; blunt and unvarnished in expressing feelings, while tolerant of the ways of others; always sharing and never cheap; accepting individuals into the group, as evidenced by giving everyone a nickname. In all, the miners have a social solidarity along with an individualism that is attractive in today's impersonal and alienated world.

FROM COAL CAMP TO OCCUPATIONAL COMMUNITY

The coal miner was molded in a particular socio-economic-political setting. Beginning from before World War I and continuing until the mid-1930's, most of Appalachia was the arena for continual class warfare. America's last rugged frontier was not in the Far West, but here. Many older miners now working or pensioned were raised in conditions of civil conflict, brutality, starvation, terrorism, and family degradation.

Until the 1930's, mine owner dominance of the lives of coal workers and their families was complete. The owners created the mining camp or company town of necessity, because coal production began in an isolated area. The operator usually provided housing, a store, water, sanitation, police, postal service, voting "rights," medical treatment, a hospital, school, church, theatre, and burial services. Absentee mine ownership resulted in lack of concern about the people and the community, their aspirations and needs. Alienation of the operators from human relationships in Appalachia, linked with fear and violence, developed a stance of snobbery toward the coal miner that became the middle-class outlook of entire counties.

In the face of wage cuts, discharge, black-listing, labor spies, mass eviction of families, and company ownership of meeting places, streets and roads, the miners repeatedly attempted to organize. The struggles that resulted were the bloodiest in the violent annals of American labor history.

The coal operators of Paint Creek and Cabin Creek stated their position on the 1912 strike and violence: the "peaceful, prosperous and contented miners were terrorized into leaving their work" by the UMW, a "lawless organization, a malignant and unscrupulous foe of the coal industry;" there could be "no compromising with organized crime."¹⁵ The lawyer-president of a large company said in 1921 that union organization means strike, "murder and arson." The UMW, he explained, "is a criminal conspiracy *per se*" that is out "to establish a soviet government . . . to get class control," and it should be driven out of a county as "an association of bank robbers. . . ." ¹⁶ The thesis was restated in more sophisticated terms by a Rockefeller spokesman defending evictions and antiunion activities in 1928.¹⁷ In eastern Kentucky this intransigent attitude lasted into World War II.

The legal United Mine Workers, its national standards endangered, saw its Appalachian branches driven underground. Mountain miners developed illegal organization, carried on intermittent guerilla war, defended tent camps, battled mine guards, and mounted major military operations, at times in a kind of primitive revolution unfortunately indistinguishable from provocation by company agents. "Which side are you on?" was a line in one of the workers' songs and also a defiant challenge.

The rough and turbulent nature of the native people may have contributed

to the violent response. Many mountain counties had supported guerilla actions against the slave-holding Confederacy during the Civil War. Indigenous coal miners were not strangers to whiskey stills, feuding, secrecy, or the marksmanship of hunters. A frequently mobile, largely uprooted or transplanted working class was thrown into strange and isolated frontier camps often carved out of the wilderness. Neither the black migrants from the South nor the Southern and Eastern European peasants imported by railroad were accustomed to town-meeting democracy. The duplicity that often surrounded their importation, the wretchedness of their daily lives, and the brutality of their treatment were not conducive to peaceful society.

The unevenness of the conflict is noteworthy. Some coal operators cared about their people and apparently made sacrifices in order to maintain jobs or conditions. A handful even broke with the front against the union. Basic economic facts rather than evil men generally were behind the turmoil of the 1920's and 30's: "overproduction," price-cutting, speculation, cutthroat competition, bankruptcy. The depression came to coal first and lasted there longest.

Miners now working were children or young men during the coal labor wars.¹⁸ Some bear the physical—many more, the emotional—scars of those years. For when the miners were defeated, they and their families were imprisoned. The coal camps were put behind fences topped with barbed wire, and armed guards stood at the gate to prevent anyone entering or leaving without a company pass. Powerful searchlights assured no nighttime escape. Yellow-dog contracts, legally signed and upheld by the courts, gave the concentration camps a distinctively American touch.

Today, the United Mine Workers appears to many so bureaucratic or ineffective that its historic achievement is sometimes overlooked. But for Appalachian victims of brutality, eviction, and starvation, the "nice" people did nothing. The faculties and the students of universities were equally apathetic as these first Southern labor organizing drives failed. The UMW conducted the war against poverty; housed, fed, and clothed its people; and fought the good fight for American civil liberties. In isolated valleys where management repeatedly pitted foreign-born against native born, black against white, and vice versa, group hatred boiled over; but the union somehow taught the brotherhood of man, far from cultural centers and with the help of few intellectuals. It welded a work force and created a labor solidarity that bridged racial and religious boundaries during the 1920's, when much of the rural and small town part of the nation succumbed to the Ku Klux Klan.

THE MINER IN HIS SETTING

The American coal miners are not a single national group like the Welsh miners. One coal company employed men of "37 nationalities" in 1922.¹⁹ The wonder is not at the initial or continuing friction but at how well people came together without serious ethnic or racial tensions. Perhaps the experience of mining develops a sense of community. Some kind of melting pot—native and ethnic "blend"—has come about among the whites. Racial discrimination has not disappeared, but small coal towns continue easygoing dialogue and social life between black and white without the ugly polarization of the cities. I doubt that racially mixed married couples can live comfortably in many places in America, but they do in several West Virginia communities,

each with populations under 2,500. Some UMW locals with less than 20% black membership regularly elect two blacks among four major officers.*

Because the gloomy darkness is oppressive and the work of the miner is inherently dangerous and dirty, it has seemed to some scholars that no man with an alternative would select coal mining as an occupation.† But coal miners have a proud sense of occupational identity, an identity often lacking in other industrial workers. A large number of men select coal mining as an occupation even when alternatives exist. But the miner may not express this attitude to a strange interviewer. Remember, there is a saying: "Niggers and coal diggers." The snob society that looks down on him expects the miner to state that his decision to work in the mines was involuntary. But there are reasons why some coal miners freely select and enjoy their occupation.

Unlike the discipline and monotony of factory work, in the mines one finds freedom, variety and little direct supervision. Foremen are somewhat limited in the same way that combat officers are, in that it is unwise to "lean" on the men in a common setting of danger. Job switching, trading arrangements, and miscellaneous "day work" frequently make an all-around man of the miner.

As underground craftsmen or operators of large machines, miners take pride in their work. The face crew usually achieves a teamwork and esprit de corps as finely honed as a combat squad. Certain implicit "rules" of team solidarity, joint decision-making, and worker discretion take over. Older men commonly refuse foreman jobs. The result often is an unstructured limitation on management prerogatives.

There is little alienation of the worker from the product in coal mining. He is not a cipher divorced from the extraction process. He understands the materials, the strategy of extracting the coal, and how his job fits into the overall pattern. His daily travel underground gives him an overview of the entire operation, past and present. The mine is a place of rapidly changing scenes, altering circumstances, and geological pioneering. The flexible situation brings about changing rhythms in the work. He is and has been essential to the nation; what he produces is necessary for the common good.

The coal miner is a male in a masculine industry where other men fear to tread. He is opening and developing territory never seen before. Not all men wish to be pencil pushers, and the hunting-fishing type of man may find in coal mining something like the satisfaction others get from skin diving, high rise construction, or motorcycle riding.

Today, with stable employment, a coal miner earns a decent income to support a family in a congenial community environment with a below average cost of living. In no other industry can a young man make comparable wages without a long apprenticeship. Many young miners have dropped out of high school; others are from families where occasional, rural, or sawmill-type work was the blue collar standard. Some come from more isolated hollows and country districts with less sophistication than mining towns.

This is not to deny that miners may feel ambivalent or that elements of inertia, tradition, or habit bear on the decision of a man to work in a coal mine. The companies may push unreasonably for production and get a

* See 23rd UMW Conv. 1912. 2: 776-795 for efforts to secure an at-large Negro union board member.

† More details are given in Ross, 3: 6-7.¹⁸

monotonous, assembly-line result which will turn the men off. Miners often say that they do not want their sons to go underground. Yet fathers, uncles, brothers, and cousins work with the new miners. The undercurrent of fatalism, pride, and family continuity is implied in the opening lines of the folk song about Harlan County: "My daddy was a miner, and I'm a miner's son."

PREPAID CARE, COMPANY DOCTORS, AND MINERS

Among other aspects of the coal miners' life has been the unique, more than century-old history of relations with physicians and operators in health care prepayment programs. In Western Maryland, the George's Creek Coal and Iron Company by 1842 provided for medical care along with other services within the military-like efficiency of community rules and regulations: "For promotion of the general health a Physician is settled at Lonaconing. Every able bodied man in the Service of the Company, who will contribute out of his wages a monthly sum of fifty cents for the support of the Physician, will be entitled to medical advice and assistance for himself and family without further charge." * ²⁰ One hundred years later, in contrast with most of their fellow Americans, 73% of all coal miners were utilizing prepaid medical service plans, and this figure rose to 97% when the area of southern West Virginia, eastern Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, and Alabama was surveyed separately.²¹

In the Appalachian mountains where coal operations began, there were often no doctors. Health services were organized as a result of management initiative. "As an incentive for physicians to establish themselves in these isolated places, the wage deduction or check-off system was instituted to provide them an assured minimum income."²¹ The company made "closed" arrangements for generalist home and office family coverage with fixed monthly payroll payments by the employees to the doctor, less a company commission. "The physician is not paid by the company, although the employment of doctors and their supervision" † lies with the owner, giving rise to a contradiction that caused problems. In some areas unusually destitute of health facilities, such as Southern Appalachia, the company set up exclusive hospital arrangements, also through payroll deduction. ‡ ²¹ This long-term history of closed panel, prepaid (usually solo, but occasionally group) health care, generally company-dominated and involuntary, existed mainly in settings without alternatives.

To secure prepaid practice in the early years required efforts by the physician to reach influential individuals in management. In letters to a major coal operator, who incidentally was governor of West Virginia, physicians were supplicants in a manner unrecognizable today. Dr. L. W. Wyatt of Shinnston wrote in 1892: "As you no doubt know the Messrs. Watson are opening a coal mine at Briar Hill, between Farnum and Glen Falls. I have about completed arrangements to act as physician and surgeon for the people at last two above

* The company regulation was promulgated in 1839 but no coal miner was hired until 1842. Previous research makes no reference to American coal mining prepaid medical care prior to 1869.^{21, 22}

† Letter of March 24, 1931, from Koppers Coal subsidiary.²³

‡ New research by the present author on the original files (1906-1923) of one such multicompany miners' hospital in Southern West Virginia is now in prepublication stage.

named points. It will hardly pay me to take them unless I can also include Briar Hill. Knowing your influence with the gentlemen named I make bold to ask you to give a word of recommendation to them." *

Dr. Z. E. Dawson of Wilsonburg in 1899 dealt somewhat more directly with economic matters: "I see in this mornings Paper of the Death of Dr. S. H. Stone of Monongah. . . [C]an I now rely upon your Influence in my behalf to secure for me his position as Physician and Surgeon at these mines as you are well acquainted with me as a mining physician. . . . Our mines here are not doing much and I have a son who is running a Drug Store in the City of Wheeling who will take charge of the Drug Store should I get the position as physician. Please . . . Inform me who to write to that has the Influence." †

Ironically, C. O. Henry, M.D. of Shinnston, who later became president of the West Virginia State Medical Association,²⁵ wrote on January 14, 1899: ". . . I learn that the Watson Coal and Coke Co. are going to appoint a physician for their coal works at Enterprise. I would like to have the appointment if the salary is sufficient for me to give it my attention. . . . I desire that you use your influence for me, feeling certain that a word from you is valuable [sic] in securing me the appointment."²⁶ Sixteen years later, at the 1915 state medical meeting, Dr. Henry launched an attack on the coal industry and its exploitation of the state on behalf of free physician billing, saying that he had held his views "for years," fully realizing that they may "run counter to the opinions of many." His onslaught on "State Paternalism" centered on the maintenance of miners' hospitals as "clearly class legislation" resulting from the fact "that coal operators conceived the idea of unloading their injured employees on the state." Dr. Henry criticized workmen's compensation legislation which "instead of paying the injured men what was justly due them," is "throwing the greater part of the burden on the tax payers" and noted the "impudence in stating to a physician that he should send his case to a [state miners'] hospital from which he has been barred." He objected to the provision of the law that excluded payment for any employee who was "under contract" for prepaid medical care. He said "the real function of these fifteen inspectors are [sic] to bulldoze the few workingmen who show an inclination to choose their own physician." ‡²⁷

The former company physician paid by coal miner prepayment asked: ". . . [C]an we longer stand idly by and see the rights of the people of our state trampled in the dust by men who are non-residents of the state and have no lasting interest in its welfare? . . . In opposing these iniquitous conditions, we realize that we will be met by the organized forces of special privilege, and that the struggle for right and justice will be a long and hard one. . . ." ²⁷

The altered position of Dr. Henry was but a symbol of the ambiguous position of company doctors in the coal mining prepaid medical care structure. Aside from well-founded and serious criticisms of the quality of care they rendered ²¹ in rural settings, these practitioners were often placed in a tight position between the company and the men. Some physicians were merely

* Letter to A. B. Fleming, May 17, 1892.²⁴

† Letter to A. B. Fleming, March 31, 1899.²⁴

‡ A final retribution in history occurred when Dr. Henry became superintendent from 1923 through 1927 of the same state's "miners' hospital" he had previously condemned.²⁵

satraps of the mine owner or were selected because of their subservience.* ^{21, 28, 29} Others were regarded as unfair and guilty of abusing the men by conducting physical examinations so as to refuse jobs in a discriminatory way.²⁰ Most physicians being paid by the miners under prepayment plans participated in grossly shifting the costs of compensation legislation from the employers, who had the legal obligation, to the men who were their patients.^{21, 23} After collective bargaining was established, these conflict-of-interest issues surfaced through the union structure and grievance machinery.²¹

Unlike physicians today who serve low income areas while they reside in well-to-do suburbs, however,³⁰ these "company doctors" frequently lived in the camps among the miners, shared their social life, and became part of the community. Despite the expectations of the employer, a few physicians even defied the oligarchical controls and served the people as friend and sympathizer in difficult circumstances.^{31, 32} The leverage on behalf of service which the coal miner felt he could exercise for himself and his family through direct payments to the physician has been lessened or lost as this prepaid "GP" system died out† and was replaced by the higher quality, specialist, and group-oriented medical care program of the UMW Welfare Fund. Changes for the better in the miners' health system during the past quarter century under collective bargaining hopefully presage further improvements and additional services in the 1970's.

THE YOUNG MINERS

Union loyalists, tried and true, the older men in the mines constitute the majority of workers today. The miner under 30 often appears hostile to both company and union, as well as cynical and disillusioned. Essentially an undisciplined person, now often coming from a mixed ethnic or different cultural background compared with the older man, far more influenced by TV, consumer values, and national norms, the young worker is unlikely to accept the older miner's relationship to the union uncritically.

The young come increasingly from outside the coal towns but inside the region, from nonminer families; increasingly, they are high school graduates. Many like horsepower—on two wheels, four wheels, or water. They love sports and fishing like their elders; they drink less. They are bright; some are wild and try to work without much sleep. The beginning of drug usage—especially dangerous in an industry requiring alertness and quick responses—has been noted. Using automobiles for transportation, the miners live everywhere. At one new mine, local union officers reside in four different counties.

It is not yet clear what role the young miners will play. They are part of the turmoil, the questioning, and the frustration of their generation. They become more like industrial workers the nation over. They show signs of

* R. R. Vaughan, M.D., of Dehue testified, along with coal operators and mine guards, that a majority of miners "are against the union."²⁸ See also Boone²¹ and the 34th UMW Convention, p. 44, for further evidence.

† The old-time check-off system of medical care in the coal fields has substantially ended. Exceptions are isolated individual contracts or the conversion of the monthly prepayment into extra coverage with modern group practices which have developed.

adoption of standard American equalitarian marriage styles. Some strive for respectability. Others accept supervisory positions, whereas still others are sharply critical of safety and working conditions.

Young miners quickly recognize that the web of rules that govern the coal mine requires observing all picket lines and maintaining solidarity. The wildcat strike is a bridge between generations because younger men are action-prone, and local union leadership is usually in the hands of older miners. Young men lose strike enthusiasm as their monthly payments rise after marriage.

At the 1902 UMW Convention, John Mitchell criticized "the thoughtless violations of contract provisions" by union members.³² Occasionally, irresponsible miners today too injure management and labor by causing unauthorized walkouts "without reason." Yet against the current background of long-enduring collective bargaining peace, work stoppages instituted by rank and file miners have become commonplace in much of the coal industry.

FOLK STYLE OF JOB ACTION

Wildcat strikes have a style of their own. The abrupt emptying of a water bucket, the delay in putting on work clothes in a change room, or the uniform reaction of men finding strange pickets posted at the mine occur against the background of a shared experience and outlook, a well functioning grapevine, and common feelings about mine conditions. Does anyone see the miner as an individual? His existence is recognized only in numbers and when acting as a group. None of the constraints about what the community or the middle class think or what some editorial writer will have to say apply to him. He fought ruthless employers for every inch he gained. Indeed, coal miners often are the local community, and sometimes they respond with their action to the absentee governor-landlord-owner in behalf of the community.

The wildcat strike is nearly always spontaneous. The issue may either have broad historical roots or touch an underlying vein of current sentiment among the workers. It represents counter power either to management's arbitrary use of normal authority or to the legalistic and slow machinery of collective bargaining. A worker's right to advance to a more skilled job, such as mechanic or electrician, represents a kind of civil right in industry that other workers will fight for.

If the action breaks on Tuesday or Wednesday, without immediate company willingness to meet, often there is no chance of getting the men back during the same week. The hunting season, county fairs, or other social events are the recreational backdrop in a very hazardous occupation.

The wildcat strike is an autonomous action that belongs to the miner and his "buddies," separate from the district or international union and in clear defiance of the company. Since wages or paycheck no longer have central urgency, issues commonly involve job posting or seniority, "property rights" in the job, or safety-related matters.

When such strikes occur, companies attempt to stand firm on procedure, requiring a return to work since the action is in violation of the contract, before discussions commence on the issue that provoked the shutdown. In a hazardous industry such a legal posture can be dangerous. At least one-third of unauthorized strikes noted by this writer in recent years were directly or indirectly

related to safety issues.* To stand on procedural grounds and require that men return to work under conditions they may regard as unsafe creates potential new hazards. Where a purely pay right is involved, the position seems to be justified.

One steel company never lets local issues "get away." It keeps up excellent communication with committees—mine, safety and otherwise; opens dialogue and promptly settles grievances; maintains close surveillance by supervisors about possible problems. The result: no wildcat strikes have occurred; the safety record is excellent; and issues are settled with local union committees, where the miners place their greatest faith anyway. If other large companies learned to trust local mine superintendents with more authority, much friction could be eliminated and morale improved.

The collective bargaining agreement *per se* does not have the significance in coal it has in other areas as an industrial constitution. During a mine disaster, a unique bureaucracy comes into being that exercises operational power; this four-party management includes the operator, the union, and federal and state mine bureaus, each with separate veto rights. The diffused sense of authority that is part of the life style of mining arises from its hazardous nature. Congressional investigators, mine inspectors with authority to close the mine or suspend operations, mine union committeemen, and reporters for the media all insure a realm of separate powers which potentially impinge on management prerogatives.

UNIQUENESS OF MINERS' WORK

A teen-age boy on his first day at the mines senses what is unique:

From the rise, Mark saw a sight he was never to forget. Below and in front of him, glared the lights of over 500 miners. . . . From fifteen feet back of the entrance, they formed a solid semi-circle of bodies which covered the track up to the edge of the tippie . . . sitting flat on the ground, squatting on their haunches, covering prop piles and empty coal cars. Their lamps were burning . . . their dinner buckets were between their feet and their tools were in their hands.

There was something powerful in the solid array of men and lights. It was not only their number, their formation, but it was also in their faces, the mutual life and dangers. . . . Here they laughed and joked . . . the clowns, songsters, orators and politicians among them vied in open competition for attention and popular acclaim. Here was their forum, their clearing house for gripes and grievances. Even action planned in the union hall was finally resolved here between the union pit committee and the pit boss, while the men stood in formation before the open mine.

Mark paused . . . before he walked down into the ranks of the massed miners to join them, to take his place as one of them, to mingle his voice, his light, his body with theirs.³⁴

The young underground miner of the future may blend something of the militancy of the old miner with that of today's public service employee. While he makes \$10,000 a year, the miner often acts the way a poor man would. After all, American working class consciousness seldom has had much to do with ideology or politics. It comes mainly from a sense of social identity that

* But see the statistical summary of Dix,³³ which although lacking refinement, finds less relationship to safety matters.

the individual gets at the work place. A dark underground mine is certainly a distinctive and alienated setting for blue collar awareness that opposite ways of life exist in an increasingly white collar society. The small Appalachian community in which the miner lives contrasts so sharply with status-seeking suburbia that the difference itself helps to reinforce his sense of separateness.

For the first time in American history, coal miners enjoy continuing social stability and regular employment. During the 1970's, because of the aging work force, tens of thousands of miners will retire and be replaced. The young miners are inexperienced and in need of developing leadership. Together, the young and the older mine workers can influence the course of events. Without their joint participation in planning for the future, the industry and union could drift into a gradual state of confusion, bordering on chaos.

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